

GARDENING

New Weapon in War Against Weeds

SINCE the war gardeners have had to learn new terms—mist propagation, rooting hormones, soil warming, and many more. Now comes a word that is fraught with promise—bipyridyls.

These chemicals are revolutionary. They have the property of acting upon the chlorophyll—the green matter—in leaves and stems of plants, and destroying them completely. When bipyridyls hit the ground the clay content of the soil, which need only be infinitesimal, breaks the chemicals down, it is believed, into carbon and ammonia, which are perfectly harmless.

For the first time we have a weapon in the war against weeds which leaves no residual effect in the soil, and with the exercise of a little skill and ingenuity can be used to control weeds in most parts of the garden. Commercially, in market gardens and plantations of bananas and other crops abroad, one of the bipyridyls, paraquat, has been used for several years, and on large areas it is sprayed upon the weeds.

Spraying danger

The spraying machines used are so guarded that there is little danger of spray drift on to cultivated crops, but in the garden I find it is safer to apply these weed-killers through a watering can with either a very small round rose to direct the liquid on to an area no more than 2in. or 3in. in diameter, or through a plastic spray bar which is cunningly constructed to throw the tiny jets backward towards the operator and not forward, where they might inadvertently touch the leaves of the cultivated plants. If a few leaves are touched by the chemical they will wither and die, but unless the whole of the cultivated plant is drenched with the chemical it will not be fatally affected.

Paraquat, which now is being made available in small quantities to the amateur, kills weeds of all kinds on paths, between crazy paving, under hedge bottoms, in shrub borders, among roses, and—if carefully applied—even among plants in herbaceous borders and rock gardens. The weeds are killed, withered and brown, within 36 hours. They can be left to rot, which they do very quickly, or they may be scratched off if their presence offends the eye.

The real value of paraquat is its tremendous knock-down effect. It kills weeds stone dead in two days. But while its peculiarity of having no life in the soil at all is of tremendous importance among plants in beds or borders, this is a slight disadvantage when we try to control weeds on paths and drives.

Use in combination

For some years we have used simazin in various formulations to kill weeds, but simazin has a very poor knock-down effect. Now one could obviously kill existing weeds immediately with paraquat and thereafter apply a simazin weedkiller which would keep the paths or drives free from weeds for at least one season.

For some reason which I cannot fathom it appears that simazin works best if it is applied in February. Paraquat works rather more slowly in the winter time than in the warmer months, but it still works. So if you have an area where the persistence of simazin in the soil is permissible—a car park, drive, or any non-cultivated area that it is desired to keep weed free—a combination of paraquat and simazin should be extremely effective.

New Weapon in War Against Weeds.

The Times (London, England), Saturday, Jan 02, 1965; pg. 11; Issue 56209. (561 words)

Category: News

© Times Newspapers Limited

Gale Document Number:CS185034786